

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND

## A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

No. 212.—THIRD SERIES. SATURDAY, JANUARY 21, 1893. PRICE TWOPENCE.

### A VALIANT IGNORANCE.

By MARY ANGELA DICKENS.

*Author of "Cross Currents," "A Mist of Error," "Her Inheritance," "A Social Success," "Kitty's Victim," "An Outstanding Debt," etc., etc.*

#### CHAPTER IV.

MRS. ROMAYNE carried the despatch-box to her bedroom and set it down on a small table. She and Falconer were leaving Nice on the following morning, and her maid was just finishing her packing. Mrs. Romaine inspected the woman's arrangements, gave her one or two orders, and then dismissed her. Left alone, she made one or two trifling preparations for the journey on her own account, and when these were completed to her satisfaction, she drew the table on which she had placed the despatch-box to the open window, and seated herself.

She drew the box towards her and unlocked it, and there was nothing in her face as she did so but the hard resentment which had grown upon it during the last few days, just touched by an indefinite and equally hard curiosity. The interest which those papers possessed for her had been created by purely artificial means; intrinsically they were nothing to her. The position which the possession of them had occupied in her thoughts lately was the sole source of the impulse under which she was acting now; under any other circumstances she might hardly have cared to look at them.

She raised the lid and paused a moment, looking down at the compact mass of papers within with a sudden vague touch of more personal interest. The box was nearly full. The various sets of papers were carefully and methodically fastened

together, and endorsed evidently upon a system. Mrs. Romaine hesitated a moment, and then took out a packet at random.

It consisted of bills all bearing dates within the last six months; all sent in by leading London tradesmen, and all for large amounts. Mrs. Romaine glanced at the figures, and her eyebrows moved with an expression of slight surprise, which was almost immediately dominated by bitter acceptance and comprehension. She opened none, however, until she came to one bearing the name of a well-known London jeweller. She read the name and the amount of the bill, and paused; then a new curiosity came into her eyes, and she unfolded the paper quickly. The account was a very long one, and as her eyes travelled quickly down it, taking in item after item, a dull red colour crept into her face, and her eyes sparkled with contemptuous resentment. She was evidently surprised, and yet half-annoyed with herself for being surprised. Two-thirds of the items in the bill in her hand were for articles of jewellery not worn by men, and not one of these had ever been seen by William Romaine's wife.

She stuffed the paper back into its fastening, tossed the bundle away and took another packet from the box with quickened interest. It consisted of miscellaneous documents, all, likewise, connected with her husband's life in London during the past winter, but of no particular interest. The next packet she opened was of the same nature, and with that the top layer of the box came to an end.

The papers below were evidently older; of varying ages, indeed, to judge from their varying tints of yellow. Disarranging a

lower layer in taking out the packet nearest to her hand, Mrs. Romaine saw that there were older papers still, beneath, and realised that the box before her contained the private papers of many years; probably all the private papers which William Romaine had preserved throughout his life. She opened the packet she had drawn out, hastily and with an angry glitter in her eyes. It consisted of businesslike-looking documents, not likely, as it seemed, to be of any interest to her.

She glanced through the first unheeding enough, and then, as she reached the end, something seemed suddenly to touch her attention. She paused a moment, with a startled, incredulous expression on her face, and began to re-read it slowly and carefully. She read it to the end again, and her face, as she finished, was a little pale and chilled-looking. She freed another paper from the packet almost mechanically, with an absorbed, preoccupied look in her eyes, opened it and read it with a strained, hardly comprehending attention which grew gradually and imperceptibly, as she went on from paper to paper, into a kind of stupefied horror. She finished the thick packet in her hands, and then she paused, lifting her pale face for a moment and gazing straight before her with an indescribable expression on its shallow hardness, as though she was realising something almost incredibly bitter and repugnant to her, and was stunned by the realisation. Then her instincts and habits of life and thought seemed to assert themselves, as it were, and to dominate the situation. Her expression changed; the stupefied look gave place to what was little deeper than bitter excitement; a patch of angry colour succeeded the pallor of a moment earlier; and her eyes glittered.

Turning to the despatch-box again, she proceeded to ransack it with a hasty eagerness of touch which differed markedly from the careless composure of her earlier proceedings. Paper after paper was torn open, glanced through—sometimes even re-read with a feverish attention—and tossed aside; sometimes with a sudden deepening of that angry flush; sometimes with a movement of the lips, as though an interjection formed itself upon them; always with a heightening of her excitement; until one packet only remained at the bottom of the box. Mrs. Romaine snatched it out, and then started slightly as she saw that it did not consist, as the

majority of the others had done, of business papers, but of letters in a woman's handwriting. Nor was it so old as many of the papers she had looked at, some of which had borne dates twenty-five years back. She opened it with a sudden hardening of her excitement, which seemed to mark the change from almost impersonal to intensely personal interest. She saw that the date was that of the second year after her marriage; that each letter was annotated in her husband's writing; and then she began deliberately to read, her lips very thin and set, her eyes cold and hard. She read the letters all through, with every comment inscribed on them, and by the time she laid the last upon the table her very lips were white with vindictive feeling strangely incongruous on her little conventional face. She sat quite still for a moment, and then rose abruptly and stood by the window with her back to the table, looking out upon the evening sky.

The strength of feeling died out of her face, however, in the course of a very few minutes, leaving it only very white and rather strange-looking, as though she had received a series of shocks which had made a mark even on material so difficult to impress as her artificial personality; and she turned, by-and-by, and contemplated the table, littered now with documents of all sorts, as though she saw, not the actual heaps of papers, but something beyond them contemptible and disgusting to her beyond expression. Then suddenly she moved forward, crammed the papers indiscriminately into the despatch-box, forced down the lid, and carried the box out of the room down the stairs towards the sitting-room where she had left Dennis Falconer.

It was an impulse not wholly consistent with the self-reliance of her ordinary manner; but that manner had been acquired in a world where shocks and difficulties were more or less disbelieved in. Face to face with so unconventional a condition of affairs Mrs. Romaine's conventional instincts were necessarily at fault; and there being no strong motive power in her to supply their place, it was only natural that she should relieve herself by turning to the man on whom the past few days had taught her to rely.

Dennis Falconer was not in the sitting-room when she opened the door, but as she stood in the doorway contemplating the empty room, he came down the corridor behind her.

"Were you looking for me?" he said with distant courtesy as he reached her. He made a movement to relieve her of the box she carried, and as he did so he was struck by her expression. "Is there anything here you wish me to see?" he said quickly and gravely.

"Yes," she said; she spoke in a dry, hard voice, about which there was a ring of excitement which made him look at her again, and realise vaguely that something was wrong.

He followed her into the room, and she motioned to him to put the box on the table.

"I have been looking them over," she said, indicating the papers with a gesture, "and I have brought them to you. They are very interesting."

She laughed a bitter, crackling little laugh, and the disapproval in ambush in Dennis Falconer's expression developed a little.

"Do you wish me to go over them now, and with you?" he enquired stiffly.

"Not with me, I think, thank you," she answered, the novel excitement about her manner finding expression once more in that harsh little laugh. "One reading is enough. But now, if you don't mind. There are business points on which I may possibly be mistaken"—she did not look as though she spoke from conviction—"and—I should like you to read them. I will go out into the garden; it is quite empty always at this time, and I want some air."

Her tone and the glance she cast at the despatch-box as she spoke made it evident that it was not closeness of material atmosphere alone that had created the necessity.

"I will read them now, certainly, if you wish it," he returned.

Then, as she took up a book which lay on a table with a mechanical gesture of acknowledgement, he opened the door for her and she went out of the room. He came back to the table, drew up a chair, and opened the despatch-box.

Two hours later Dennis Falconer was still sitting in that same chair, his right hand, which rested on the table, clenched until the knuckles were white, his face pale to the very lips beneath its tan. In his eyes, fixed in a kind of dreadful fascination on the innocent-looking piles of papers before him, there was a look of shocked, almost incredulous horror, which seemed to touch all that was narrow and dogmatic about his ordinary expression

into something deep and almost solemn. The door opened, and he started painfully. It was only the waiter with preliminary preparations for dinner, and recovering himself with an effort Falconer rose, and slowly, almost as though their very touch was repugnant to him, began to replace the papers in the box. He locked it, and then left the room, carrying it with him.

Dinner was served, and Mrs. Romaine had been waiting some two or three minutes before he reappeared. He was still pale, and the horror had rather settled down on to his face than left it; but it had changed its character somewhat; the breadth was gone from it. It was as though he had passed through a moment of expansion and insight to contract again to his ordinary limits. Mrs. Romaine was standing near the window; the excitement had almost entirely subsided from her manner, leaving her only harder and more bitter in expression than she had been three hours before. She glanced sharply at Falconer as he came towards her with a constrained conventional word or two of apology; answered him with the words his speech demanded, and they sat down to dinner.

It was a silent meal. Mrs. Romaine made two or three remarks on general topics, and asked one or two questions as to their journey of the following day; and Falconer responded as briefly as courtesy allowed. On his own account he originated no observation whatever until dinner was over, and the final disappearance of the waiter had been succeeded by a total silence.

Mrs. Romaine was still sitting opposite him, one elbow resting on the table, her head leaning on her hand as she absently played with some grapes on which her eyes were fixed. Falconer glanced across at her once or twice, evidently with a growing conviction that it was incumbent on him to speak, and with a growing uncertainty as to what he should say. This latter condition of things helped to make his tone even unusually formal and dogmatic as he said at last:

"Sympathy, I fear, must seem almost a farce!"

She glanced up quickly, her eyes very bright and hard.

"Sympathy?" she said drily. "I don't know that there is any new call for sympathy, is there? After all, things are very much where they were!"

A kind of shock passed across Falconer's face; a materialisation of a mental process.

"What we know now——" he began stiffly.

"What we knew before was quite enough!" interrupted Mrs. Romaine. "When one has arrived violently at the foot of the precipice, it is of no particular moment how long one has been living on the precipice's edge. While nothing was known, Mr. Romaine was only on the precipice's edge, and as no one knew of the precipice it was practically as though none existed. Directly one thing came out it was all over! He was over the edge. Nothing could make it either better or worse."

She spoke almost carelessly, though very bitterly, as though she felt her words to be almost truisms, and Falconer stared at her for a moment in silence. Then he said with stern formality, as though he were making a deliberate effort to realise her point of view:

"You imply that Mr. Romaine's fall—his going over the edge of the precipice, if I may adopt your figure—consisted in the discovery of his misdeeds. Do you mean that you think it would have been better if nothing had ever been known?"

Mrs. Romaine raised her eyebrows.

"Of course!" she said amazedly. Then catching sight of her cousin's face she shrugged her shoulders with a little gesture of deprecating concession. "Oh, of course, I don't mean that Mr. Romaine himself would have been any better if nothing had ever come out," she said impatiently. "The right and wrong and all that kind of thing would have been the same, I suppose. But I don't see how ruin and suicide improve the position."

She rose as she spoke, and Falconer made no answer.

Mrs. Romaine had touched on the great realities of life, the everlasting mystery of the spirit of man with its unfathomable obligations and disabilities; had touched on them carelessly, patronisingly, as "all that kind of thing." She was as absolutely blind to the depth of their significance as is a man without eyesight to the illimitable spaces of the sky above him. To Falconer her tone was simply scandalising. He did not understand her ignorance. He could not touch the pathos of its limitations and the possibilities by which it was surrounded. The grim irony of such a tone as used by the

ephemeral of the immutable was beyond his ken.

"I have several things to see to upstairs," Mrs. Romaine went on after a moment's pause. "I shall go up now, and I think, if you will excuse me, I will not come down again. We start so early. Good night!"

"Good night!" he returned stiffly; and with a little superior, contemptuous smile on her face she went away.

#### CHAPTER V.

DENNIS FALCONER had been alone for nearly an hour, when his solitude was broken up by the appearance of a waiter, who presented him with a card, and the information that the gentleman whose name it bore was in the smoking-room. The name was Dr. Aston's, and after a moment's reflection Falconer told the waiter to ask the gentleman to come upstairs. Falconer had spent that last hour in meditation, which had grown steadily deeper and graver. It seemed to have carried him beyond the formal and dogmatic attitude of mind with which he had met Mrs. Romaine, back to the borders of those larger regions he had touched when he sat looking at William Romaine's papers; and there was a warmth and gratitude in his reception of Dr. Aston when that gentleman appeared, that suggested that he was not so completely sufficient for himself as usual.

"The smoking-room is very full, I imagine?" he said, as he welcomed the little doctor. "My cousin has gone to bed, and I thought if you didn't mind coming up, doctor, we should be better off here."

Dr. Aston's answer was characteristically hearty and alert. Knowing it to be Falconer's last night at Nice, he had come round, he said, just for a farewell word, and to arrange, if possible, for a meeting later on under happier circumstances. A quiet chat over a cigar was what he had not hoped for, but the thing of all others he would like. He settled himself with a genial instinct for comfort in the arm-chair Falconer pulled round to the window for him; accepted a cigar and prepared to light it; glancing now and again at the younger man's face with shrewd, kindly eyes, which had already noticed something unusual in its expression.

Dr. Aston and Dennis Falconer had met some six years before in Africa under circumstances which had brought out all that



was best in the young man's character; and Dr. Aston had been warmly attracted by him. Being a particularly shrewd student of human nature, he had taken his measure accurately enough subsequently, and knew as certainly as one man may of another where his weak points lay, and how time was dealing with them. But his kindness for, and interest in, Dennis Falconer had never abated; perhaps because his insight did not, as so much human insight does, stop at the weak points.

Dennis Falconer, for his part, regarded Dr. Aston with an affectionate respect which he gave to hardly any other man on earth.

There was a short silence as the two men lit their cigars, and then Dr. Aston, with another glance at Falconer's face, broke it with a kindly, delicate enquiry after Mrs. Romaine. Falconer answered it almost absently, but with an instinctive stiffening, so to speak, of his face and voice, and there was another pause. The doctor was trying the experiment of waiting for a lead. He was just deciding that he must make another attempt on his own account when Falconer took his cigar from between his lips and said, with his eyes fixed on the evening sky:

"I'm always glad to see you, doctor; but I never was more glad than to-night."

A sound proceeded from the doctor which might have been described as a grunt if it had been less delicately sympathetic, and Falconer continued:

"I've been trying to think out a problem, and it was one too many for me: the origin of evil."

He was thoroughly in earnest, and nothing was further from him than any thought of lightness or flippancy. But there was a calm familiarity and matter-of-course acquaintanceship with his subject about his tone that produced a slight quiver about the corners of the little doctor's mouth. He did not speak, however, and the movement with which he took his cigar from between his lips and turned to Falconer was merely sympathetic and interested.

"Of course, I know it's an unprofitable subject enough," continued Falconer almost apologetically. "We shall never be much the wiser on the subject, struggle as we may. But still, now and then it seems to be forced on one. It has been forced on me to-day."

"Apropos of William Romaine?" sug-

gested Dr. Aston, so delicately that the words seemed rather a sympathetic comment than a question.

"Yes," returned Falconer. "We have been looking through his private papers." He paused a moment, and then continued as if drawn on almost in spite of himself. "You knew him by repute, I dare say, doctor. He had one of those strong personalities which get conveyed even by hearsay. A clever man, striking and dominating, universally liked and deferred to. Yet he must have been as absolutely without principle as this table is without feeling."

He struck the little table between them with his open hand as he spoke; and then, as though the expression of his feelings had begotten, as is often the case, an irresistible desire to relieve himself further, he answered Dr. Aston's interested ejaculation as if it had been the question the doctor was at once too well-bred and too full of tact to put.

"There were no papers connected with this last disgraceful affair—those, as you know, I dare say, were all seized in London. It's the man's past life that these private papers throw light on. Light, did I say? It was a life of systematic, cold-blooded villainy, for which no colours could be dark enough."

He had uttered his last sentence involuntarily, as it seemed, and now he laid down his cigar, and turning to Dr. Aston, began to speak low and quickly.

"They are papers of all kinds," he said. "Letters, business documents, memoranda of every description, and two-thirds of them at least have reference to fraud and wrong of one kind or another. Not one penny that man possessed can have been honestly come by. His business was swindling; every one of his business transactions was founded on fraud. He can have had no faith or honesty of any sort or kind. He was living with another woman before he had been married a year. All that woman's letters—he deceived her abominably, and it's fortunate that she died—are annotated and endorsed like his 'business' memoranda; evidently kept deliberately as so much stored experience for future use!"

Dr. Aston had listened with a keen, alert expression of intent interest. His cigar was forgotten, and he laid it down now as if impatient of any distraction, and leant forward over the table with his shrewd, kindly little eyes fixed eagerly on Falconer. Human nature was a hobby of his.

Falconer's confidence, or more truly perhaps the manner of it, had swept away all conventional barriers, and the elder man asked two or three quick, penetrating questions.

"How far back do these records go?" he asked finally.

"They cover five-and-twenty years, I should say," returned Falconer. "The first note on a successful fraud must have been made when he was about four-and-twenty. Why, even then—when he was a mere boy—he must have been entirely without moral sense!"

"Yes!" said the doctor, with a certain dry briskness of manner which was apt to come to him in moments of excitement. "That is exactly what he was, my boy! It was that, in conjunction with his powerful brain, that made him what you called just now dominating. It gave him vantage-ground over his fellow-men. He was as literally without moral sense as a colour-blind man is without a sense of colour, or a homicidal maniac without a sense of the sanctity of human life."

An expression of rather horrified and entirely uncomprehending protest spread itself over Falconer's face.

"Romaine was not mad," he objected, with that incapacity for penetrating beneath the surface which was characteristic of him. "I never even heard that there was madness in the family."

"You would find it if you looked far enough, without a doubt!" answered the doctor decidedly. "This is a most interesting subject, Dennis, and it's one that it's very difficult to look into without upsetting the whole theory of moral responsibility, and doing more harm than enough. I don't say Romaine was mad, as the word is usually understood, but all you tell me confirms a notion I have had about him ever since this affair came out. He was what we call morally insane. I'll tell you what first put the idea into my head. It was the extraordinary obtuseness, the extraordinary want of perception, of that blunder of his that burst up the whole thing. Look at it for yourself. It was a flaw in his comprehension of moral sense only possible in a man who knew of the quality by hearsay alone. He must have been a very remarkable man. I wish I had known him!"

"I have heard the term 'moral insanity,' of course," said Falconer slowly and distastefully, ignoring the doctor's last, purely

æsthetic sentence, "but it has always seemed to me, doctor, if you'll pardon my saying so, a very dangerous tampering with things that should be sacred even from science. I cannot believe that any man is actually incapable of knowing right from wrong."

"The difficulty is," said the doctor drily, "that the words right and wrong sometimes convey nothing to him, as the words red and blue convey nothing to a colour-blind man, and the endearments of his wife convey nothing to the lunatic who is convinced that she is trying to poison him." He paused a moment, and then said abruptly: "Are there any children?"

Falconer glanced at him and changed colour slightly.

"Yes," he said slowly. "One boy!"

The keen, shrewd face of the elder man softened suddenly and indescribably under one of those quick sympathetic impulses which were Dr. Aston's great charm.

"Heaven help his mother!" he said gently.

Falconer moved quickly and protestingly, and there was a touch of something like rebuke in his voice as he said:

"Doctor, you don't mean to say that you think——"

"You believe in heredity, I suppose?" interrupted the doctor quickly. "Well, at least, you believe in the heredity you can't deny—that a child may—or rather must—inherit, not only physical traits and infirmities, but mental tendencies; likes, dislikes, aptitudes, incapacities, or what not. Be consistent, man, and acknowledge the sequel, though it's pleasanter to shut one's eyes to it, I admit. Put the theory of moral insanity out of the question for the moment if you like; say that Romaine was a pronounced specimen of the common criminal. Why should not his child inherit his father's tendency to crime, his father's aptitude for lying and thieving, as he might inherit his father's eyes or his father's liking for music—if he had a turn that way? You're a religious man, Falconer, I know. You believe, I take it, that the sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children. How can they be visited more heavily than in their reproduction? You mark my words, my boy, that little child of Romaine's—unless he inherits strong counter influences from his mother, or some far-away ancestor—will go the way his father has gone, and may end as his father has ended!"

There was a slight sound by the door behind the two men as Dr. Aston finished—finished with a force and solemnity that carried a painful thrill of conviction even through the not very penetrable outer crust of dogma which enwrapped Dennis Falconer—and the latter turned his head involuntarily. The next instant both men had sprung to their feet, and were standing dumb and aghast face to face with Mrs. Romayne. She was standing with her hand still on the lock of the door as if her attention had been arrested just as she was entering the room; she had apparently recoiled, for she was pressed now tightly against the door; her face was white to the very lips, and a vague thought passed through Falconer that he had never seen it before; it was as though the look in her eyes, as she gazed at Dr. Aston, had changed it beyond recognition.

There was a moment's dead silence; a moment during which Dr. Aston turned from red to white and from white to red again, and struggled vainly to find words; a moment during which Falconer could only stare blankly at that unfamiliar woman's face. Then, while the two men were still utterly at a loss, Mrs. Romayne seemed gradually to command herself, as if with a tremendous effort. Gradually, as he looked at her, Falconer saw the face with which he was familiar shape itself, so to speak, upon that other face he did not know. He saw her eyes change and harden as if with the effort necessitated by her conventional instinct against a scene. He saw the quivering horror of her mouth alter and subside in the hard little society smile he knew well, only a little stiffer than usual as her face was whiter; and then he heard her speak.

With a little movement of her head in civil recognition of Dr. Aston's presence, she said to Falconer:

"My book is on that table. Will you give it to me, please?"

Her voice was quite steady, though a little thin. Almost mechanically Falconer handed her the book she asked for, and with another slight inclination of her head, before Dr. Aston had recovered his balance sufficiently to speak, she was gone.

The door closed behind her, and a low ejaculation broke from the doctor. Then he drew a long breath, and said slowly:

"That's a remarkable woman."

Falconer drew his hand across his forehead as though he were a little dazed.

"I think not!" he said stupidly. "Not when you know her!"

"Ah!" returned the doctor, with a shrewd glance at him. "And you do know her?"

If Falconer could have seen Mrs. Romayne an hour later, he would have been more than ever convinced of the correctness of his judgement. The preparations for departure were nearly concluded; she had dismissed her maid and was finishing them herself with her usual quiet deliberation, though her face was very pale and set.

But it might have perplexed him somewhat if he had seen her, when everything was done, stop short in the middle of the room and lift her hands to her head as though something oppressed her almost more heavily than she could bear.

"End as his father ended!" she said below her breath. "Ruin and disgrace!"

She turned and crossed the room to where her travelling-bag stood, and drew from it a letter, thrust into a pocket with several others.

It was the blotted little letter which began "My dear Mamma," and when she returned it to the bag at last, her face was once again the face that Dennis Falconer did not know.

## THE ENEMIES OF TOBACCO.

IN a recent number of "The Idler," Mr. G. R. Sims's eulogium on tobacco is faced by Dr. Parker's characteristically exaggerated denunciation, and Dr. Richardson's more measured condemnation of the soothing herb. The enemies of tobacco, like the poor, are always with us. From its very introduction the weed has been the object of continuous, and often embittered attack. Yet the world still smokes, smokes more steadily and more generally than at any previous period in the history of the practice. The lovers of tobacco may nowadays smoke their pipes in peace, in all parts of the world; but it was once far otherwise. "My Lady Nicotine" has had many martyrs.

The Turks are now a nation of smokers, but early in the seventeenth century, the priests and rulers denounced smoking as criminal, and Amurath the Fourth ordered its punishment by death in the cruellest forms. One playful punishment consisted in thrusting the pipes of smokers through their noses.



In Russia, at the same period, the noses of smokers were cut off. The powers ecclesiastical were strongly opposed to the new habit, and Popes Urban the Eighth and Innocent the Tenth thundered in turn against the terrible vice of smoking. The papal thunders, however, proved powerless against the charms of St. Nicotine; although there was much reason in those decrees which were directed against the custom of smoking and snuffing in church. Pope Urban excommunicated all who should be guilty of so unbecoming a practice; and later, Innocent the Tenth solemnly excommunicated all those who should take snuff or tobacco in St. Peter's Church, at Rome.

In England, tobacco quickly established itself, and in the first enthusiasm for the new habit of "drinking tobacco," as they styled it, our ancestors often went to considerable excess. One reverend gentleman, a Buckinghamshire vicar—described in that astrological age as a profound divine, but absolutely the most polite person of the period for natiivities—was so bent upon smoking, that when his supply of tobacco ran short, he would cut up the bell-ropes and smoke the shredded fibre. If tobacco was enthusiastically welcomed, it was as warmly denounced. Very early in its English history an enemy elegantly wrote:

Let it be damn'd to Hell, and call'd from thence,  
Proserpine's wine, the Furies' frankincense,  
The devil's addle eggs.

Joshua Sylvester, the translator of Du Bartas, in 1615 published a work whose title is sufficiently violent—"Tobacco Battered, and the Pipes Shattered about their Eares, that idely Idolize so base and barbarous a Weed, or at least over-love so loathsome a Vanity, by a Volley of Holy Shot Thundered from Mount Helicon."

One of its earliest opponents was Ben Jonson. The dramatist was fond of tavern life, and was devoted to the "lyric feasts" described by Herrick—

Where we such clusters had,  
As made us nobly wild, not mad,

but for smoking he had no liking. In his earlier plays he frequently introduces a lover of tobacco, but always makes him figure somewhat contemptibly as a knave or fool. In "The Alchemist" there is a tobaccoist, Abel Drugger—one of Garrick's best parts—whose character as an easily duped fool is painted with an unparing

hand. The tricks of tobaccoists of that early era are also hinted at. We hear of dealers in the herb who sophisticated it with sack-lees, or oil, and washed it in muscadell and grains, a process which does not sound very inviting.

Another enemy of tobacco was worthy John Stow, who styles it "That stinking weed so much abused to God's dishonour." Nashe calls the devil a "great tobacco-taker," but, on the other hand, he speaks genially of the "divine drugge," and from various other allusions would seem to have been a follower of the new fashion. Dekker writes somewhat scornfully of smoking. He alludes to the nose which some "most injuriously and improperly" make serve for an Indian chimney; yet elsewhere he speaks of tobacco as "that costlie and gentleman-like smoak," and tells a tale of a jester who refused a pipe because it had the three bad properties of making any man a thief (which meant danger), a good fellow (which required cost), and a niggard (the name of which is hateful). This he explained as follows: it makes a man a thief, for he will steal it from his father; a good fellow, for he will give the smoke to a beggar; and a niggard, for he will not part with his box to an emperor.

A more determined and unequivocal opponent of tobacco soon appeared in the field in the person of King James the First. In his famous "Counter-blast," he denounced the Indian weed, "lock, stock, and barrel." There was nothing good to be said for it. Its effects were bad, physically and morally. Moreover, and here his argument became decidedly weak, it was wicked and disgraceful for Christians to borrow anything from barbarous heathens. In conclusion, smoking was denounced as "a custom loathsome to the eye, hateful to the nose, harmful to the brain, dangerous to the lungs; and, in the black stinking fume thereof, nearest resembling the horrible Stygian smoke of the pit that is bottomless." And yet, notwithstanding this tremendous diatribe, His Majesty somewhat inconsistently permitted the planters in the American colonies to send their tobacco to England, while he cannily forbade the importation of the pernicious drug from the dominions of Spain. It must be added, however, that he tried hard to induce the Virginian colonists to abandon the cultivation of tobacco, and to take up that of silk, which he recommended as a rich and solid commodity preferable to the noxious weed. Charles the First made



a similar attempt. He bade the colonists send home "some better fruit than tobacco and smoke," and so avoid "the speedy ruin likely to befall the colonies, and the dangers to the bodies and manners of the English people, through the excessive growth of tobacco."

Many enemies of tobacco imitated King James in the vehemence of their denunciations of the weed, and, may it be added, in the weakness of their arguments. One John Deacon published in 1616 a quarto volume, now rare, to which he gave the attractive title: "Tobacco tortured; or the filthy fume of tobacco refined, shewing all sorts of subjects that the inward taking of tobacco fumes is very pernicious unto their bodies, too too profluous for many of their purses, and most pestiferous to the publique State." The book is in the form of a dialogue; and after nearly two hundred pages of argument, in which the unfortunate herb gets no mercy, one of the interlocutors, a trader in tobacco, is so convinced of the iniquity of his trade, and of his own parlous state, that he declares that the two hundred pounds' worth of this "beastly tobacco" which he owns, shall "presently packe to the fire," or else be sent "swimming downe the Thames."

A few years later, in 1621, it was solemnly attacked in the House of Commons, and a Member moved that he "would have tobacco banished wholly out of the kingdom, and that it may not be brought in from any part, nor used amongst us." Another Member said that if tobacco were not banished, it would overthrow a hundred thousand men in England, for it was now so common that he had seen ploughmen take it as they were at plough. But both the House of Commons and the country refused to be frightened by the ploughman's pipe, or by terrible predictions of national ruin, and the use of tobacco continued to spread.

The Merry Monarch had a fling at it when he sent a letter to the University of Cambridge, forbidding the members to wear periwigs, to smoke tobacco, or to read their sermons! But the Royal mandate had little effect. The friends of tobacco even began to turn the tables, and to act on the offensive. It was said that in the Great Plague of London, none of those who kept tobacco-shops suffered from it, and so smoking came to be regarded as an excellent preservative from contagion in such pestilences. Curiously enough, it is said to be a fact

that during the cholera epidemics of 1831, 1849, and 1866, not one London tobaccoist died from that disease. When the plague was abroad even children were compelled to smoke; and at the time of the dreadful visitation of 1665, all the boys at Eton were obliged to smoke in the school every morning. One of these juvenile smokers declared years afterwards, to Hearne, the antiquary, that he never was whipped so much in his life as he was one morning for not smoking. Times have changed at Eton since this anti-tobaccoist martyr received his whipping.

The enemies of tobacco have not yet died out. An Anti-Tobacco Association still continues to exist, we believe, but its outlook cannot be very cheerful. Smokers are still liable to be told that Balzac wrote: "*Le tabac détruit le corps, attaque l'intelligence, et hébète une nation*;" and the opinions of certain doctors are often quoted with great unction; but lovers of tobacco console themselves with the trite reflection that doctors disagree, and with the thought that if tobacco is a poison, it must be, as Fontenelle said of coffee, a very slow poison. Most of us will continue to applaud Lord Lytton's summing-up: "A pipe! It is a great soother, a pleasant comforter. Blue devils fly before its honest breath. It ripens the brain, it opens the heart; and the man who smokes, thinks like a sage, and acts like a Samaritan."

## A NIGHT WITH THE ROOFERS IN NEW YORK.

"COME, my Telemachus," said my big cousin Tom a few evenings since, "if you are stifling in this wide and breezy hall, I will show thee how many of thy brethren in this city live; yea, I will lead thee to realms that are hotter than this."

And he did, indeed.

We went to see the "Roofers"—poor people who sleep on the roofs or any place where they can get a breath of fresh air. Whenever Tom takes me on what he calls a "prowling expedition," I put an extra pin in my hat and leave at home anything which might tempt dishonest fingers; while Tom invites "Nevermore," a stout walking-stick he possesses, to go too, and then he, "Nevermore"—so called because his head looks like that "Nevermore" raven, you know—and I, are prepared to

follow our reverend Mentor through divers and tortuous paths. First, as it was rather early to see the Roofers in their most picturesque aspect, we walked down Mulberry Street—the Italian quarter—to “Five Points,” the New York “Seven Dials.” Mulberry Street is not very wide, and when most of its inhabitants are out gossiping with their neighbours the progress of a pedestrian is necessarily rather slow. All the way the curb was lined with stalls, most of them made of a board resting on a couple of boxes. On this board were displayed weary-looking lettuces and a little scraggy plant with tiny yellow flowers—I can’t think what it is unless it be mustard—stale bread, “Hoky poky” ice cream, and large yellow beans. The bread was generally in big calico bags which lay on the pavement. Then, too, there were oranges and lemons, all of them wet-looking, as if they had been “fished up” from almost anywhere, and washed to look presentable. Scores of the shopkeepers were women who sat on the pavement or a doorstep, and held their shops in their laps. For instance, a woman would have a tin pan, perhaps half full of oranges and lemons, between her knees, with several loaves of bread tucked about it to keep it steady, a little pot of beans by her side, a bunch of that mysterious yellow plant in one hand, and she would still be able to serve her customers with the free hand, or to hold on to a baby with it. I never saw so many children to the square inch in my life. Positively there were swarms of them; half naked, tangle-haired, dirty-faced urchins. I, in my simplicity, wondered why they were not in their homes, if the mothers were always quite sure they had the right ones when they did call them in, they were so nearly a size and there was such a general resemblance. I am certain one woman had more than her share, for I counted seven she was keeping guard over, and if they were not all twins they looked very near it. The women never wear any head-covering, save their own hair, which is often very beautiful, or a kerchief, and as I wore a hat I was an object of much attention. Indeed I felt quite philanthropic, much as Madame Patti must when she sings at a charity concert for charity—so much amusement for the audience, no salary to the performer. The inhabitants of Mulberry Street all retire and rise early. But the old adage about “Healthy, wealthy, and wise” does not seem to apply here! Perhaps, when

we remember that, in the comparatively small area embraced by Broadway and the Bowery, Canal and Chatham Streets, there are near four thousand four hundred “apartments”—all so crowded that the health officers have been obliged to cut the standard of breathing room for an adult from six hundred to four hundred cubic feet—it will be seen that something beside “early to bed and early to rise,” is needed to bring about the happy state of affairs the proverb promises. Down about Cherry Street, once patrician “Cherry Hill,” we did not see much of the Roofers, for the reason that many of the houses now used as tenements were once old family mansions, and are built with dormer roofs. Here the children of the Emerald Isle hold forth, or rather hang forth, on anything which is reached by a breath of fresh air. Then we went to the Jewish quarter. One roof was all I wanted. If I told the number of flights of stairs I think we climbed, I fear I should be accused of “imagination.” Let it suffice to say that we climbed—and climbed—and climbed. Many of the women were still engaged in their household duties, and I peeped into their rooms to see what they were doing; the one who most interested me was making “nudels” to put into soup. Deftly cutting long strips of dough on a board which lay across a chair, and then spreading them to dry on—what? I must tell the fact as I saw it. She was spreading those nudels on a bed. *The bed*, I might say, for it was the only one left in the suite of two rooms. The family, seven in all, would sleep on the roof that night, and the nudels would occupy what was left of the bed. Up on the roof the inhabitants of the two upper floors were holding converse; sweet, no doubt, but as I am not conversant with Hebrew, I must be excused from repeating it. I am too much of a Del-sartian, however, to mistake the gestures they made as invitations to make our stay a long one, though I remained long enough to see two women, the ugliest and the most beautiful I ever beheld—mother and daughter. The mother was so hideously ugly that at first sight I thought that she was dreadfully deformed, but she was not, except as a fearful spirit of greed had twisted her body. The daughter, a superb young creature, was lovely as an Islamite’s dream of an houri. Many of these women are extremely beautiful in youth, but becoming wives and mothers at fifteen or sixteen, at five-and-twenty they are almost old women.

Cleanliness is evidently not a vital part of their creed—at least the quilts and pillows they were beginning to spread about would not seem to indicate it.

We had been there only a minute or two when an awe-inspiring figure, a very old man, with a skull cap covering his venerable head, and arrayed in a strange-looking, long-skirted kaftan, moved toward us. As I say I do not understand Hebrew, but should any one ever again give me in Hebrew, or in any other tongue, such another pressing invitation to make his people my people, and his roof my abiding place, I should accept it with the same hurried eagerness I did his—I should run away, in fact, as I did then. In my downward course I fell over four children and got lost three times, but breathless but nothing daunted we reached the pavement in course of time, and the Mulberry Street roofs became our next venture.

The top of the street was too painfully respectable for us, so we proceeded at once to its most densely packed portion, known as "The Bend" just where it turns in sight of the famous "Five Points." The Five Points are fast losing their reputation as the worst and most dangerous place in America. The reformation which the police vainly tried for years to effect is being accomplished quietly and steadily by a mission which began its labours in one tiny room, but which now owns a fine building in one of the very points from which the place takes its name. As we walked down the Bend what a change from two hours before! Scarcely a figure to be seen walking about; but in doorways, on the pavements out to the very curb, and, in several places, in the centre of the narrow street, were recumbent figures, men, women, children—a motley crowd seeking slumber and air. We stole about among them as quietly as possible. Occasionally a disturbed sleeper would start to his elbow, one hand instinctively seeking a shining sharp something in his bosom, but Tom, warned by our reception in the Jewish quarters, had pressed into service, as guide, one of the best known officers of the precinct, and the disturbed one seeing him would sink back again.

"You can see about all there is to see of the Roofers right here in these two houses," said the officer, "the rest are only variations of the same thing; but first you must go through into the court and see

what chance there is for air to circulate about the buildings."

Following him we were led through a long hall in which lay nine sleepers, out into a little roofless box called by courtesy a court. On all sides rise, storey after storey, houses whose frail fire-escapes were crowded with people vainly trying to find comfort. There was not an opening anywhere that had not its occupant. In the very court where we stood there were three men sleeping. Into the house and up the many flights of stairs we were guided by the officer who knows the Bend so well that he can find his way in the dark. When we reached the roof we were met by the person of the house, who demanded our errand. She spoke English very well, and being reassured by the officer's presence, volunteered considerable information about her lodgers, and spoke at length of her next-door neighbours.

"Neapolitan alla them—lazy, dirty, no gooda loafer; you see my house, clean; you see that one—ugh! Alla Genoese here, never Neapolitan, non, non, signora."

Caste is perhaps nowhere more strongly marked than in the New York Italian emigrants. The Genoese feel their own superiority very strongly, and not without reason, for of all the thousands of poor Italians who have landed at Castle Garden and overflowed New York, the lowest and laziest are the Neapolitans.

While the landlady was enlarging upon the thieving propensities of her neighbours from Naples, I took in the scene about me. The roof was tarred and sprinkled with sand, and in the still fierce heat—the very walls seemed to exhale hot waves—its odour was strongly apparent. The entire roof was covered with thick planks set edgewise about three feet apart, and across from one to the other were nailed at intervals slender boards, thus forming a kind of continuous rack, so that the sleepers did not touch the tar. The rooms below had been almost entirely denuded of the little furniture they usually held, and anything that could be lain on or used as a pillow was made to do duty. The place was as thickly covered as its space would allow, and had it not been for the tall wooden paling about the edge, some one would surely have been crowded off. Sometimes a man walking in his sleep has been known to step off where the fence was defective, and the officer showed us a place, in that very roof, where a little girl had crept



through a broken paling and fallen five storeys to the stones below.

As we descended the officer stopped at one or two of the rooms, and when he threw the light of his little lantern into them I saw that the landlady's boast of cleanliness was a true one; everything that could be scrubbed was as clean as sand, water, and earnestness could make it. The Italian's instinctive reaching towards the beautiful, which must be strong indeed to survive in such a place, showed itself in the attempted decoration of those wretched little rooms. Bits of bright paper and strips of gay cloth, doubtless culled from their rag-picking carts, were made into flowers which hung about the crucifix, or woven into a lambrequin for the shelf which supported it, and in one room there hung a remembrance of years passed in Spain—a matador's cap.

"Now you'd better take good care to hold your dress from the floor," was the officer's advice to me as we entered the house where dwelt the "dirty no gooda" Neapolitans. Such a place! such a place! the hydrant in the first hall had been leaking profusely and the floor was wet in places, but, notwithstanding, it was covered with slumberers. We did not pause in it, but went at once to the court, and there we saw that most barbarous monument of the landlord's greed—a "rear tenement"—a house built in what should be the court for the surrounding buildings, and having no entrance from the street save through the other tenements, or by a long, low corridor built through their walls. Not only was it so close to the buildings about it that the air could not possibly circulate with any freedom, but it was much lower than they. It was literally packed from basement to roof with poor wretches who, half clad, had tumbled down anywhere to sleep. The rooms having an outer window were stifling, and a moment in a tiny bedroom having no window but one opening on a dark hall sent me flying out of it. In one such room slept a man, his wife, and three children; and in the little room adjoining it three other children, for there is seldom room on the roof for more than the upper two floors. Many of the room-holders take lodgers, and a policeman is constantly kept on the look-out for illegal overcrowding.

On the roof the scene was almost beyond belief, unless one were to see it with his own eyes. On one side were beams running parallel the length of the roof and

about six feet apart, and between these were fastened strips of coarse canvas to serve as bunks, similar to the beds in a New York seven cent lodging-house. The rest of the sleepers lay on the sand-covered roof, many with no pillows save their own arms. The whole scene was clearly lighted by a splendid moon, and looked more a dream than a reality. One pretty girl of nineteen had removed the body of her gown and lay with her head resting on it, her fine arms and shoulders bare. As I stooped over her, a girl not much older than myself, the difference—which was through no virtue of my own nor fault of hers—swelled my heart with a great ache. She must have slipped from her pillow once, for one soft shoulder was dented with the sand which covered the tarred roof, yet she slept on as peacefully as if she were sheltered and cared for as such a pretty thing ought to have been. I took a bunch of violets I had in my belt and gently sprinkled them in her loose, soft hair and on her smooth throat, and then stole away—sentimental I know, but I did want her to touch something sweet.

From house to house we went, but found only variations of the same thing. On one roof we saw a bit of the picturesque as well as the poverty of Italy. A young man and girl—his sweetheart, I fancied—were leaning against a chimney, and while he softly tinkled an old guitar she sang under her breath to a sleepy accompaniment of growling protests from the tired ones about her. On another roof every one was asleep save an old woman, who sat by the slumbering form of a youth, evidently her son, so slender and perfectly formed that he might have been a young Mercury done in bronze. The intense heat of the night had made him throw open the neck of his shirt, and she sat with one wrinkled old hand on his smooth young chest, and with the other was slipping the beads of a rosary. The quick tears leaped to my eyes. Ah, her fine strong lad, how proud she was of him, and did she not pray for him as fervently as though she watched by a silken couch!

The last tenement we visited was a very low, small, two-storey house in Baxter Street. The ground-floor is occupied by horses. Yes, it is a regular stable. There surely must be truth in the theory that a place where horses live, no matter how filthy, is never so dangerous to health as a similar habitation of human beings. Were it not so, that stable in conjunction with



the fearful court behind it must, in spite of the disinfectants continually placed in such places by the health officers, have long since bred the most dreadful diseases. As we were about to enter we were met by a policeman, who drove before him six or seven men who were ejaculating all the Italian they could think of appropriate to the occasion. One, especially fluent, added to his Italian a very English word beginning with a big, big "D." The first English these people learn on landing in America, by-the-bye, is "Hello!" and the word just mentioned; sometimes "hello" is misplaced, as for instance, when they mean good-bye, but that other word never. The exodus was only occasioned by the nightly weeding out of the hobbed within; fifteen minutes after the officer left they would all be back again. The upper floor of the house we were inspecting was occupied by three families with so many children that even the officer could only approximate their number. There is a bend in the long, low passage leading from the street to the court, and just as we reached it a man sprang out of the darkness, slipped under the officer's arm, and sped away down the street. I expected to see something awful when we reached the court, but it was too common a sight to affect the officer—only a woman pacing to and fro with a little baby, who showed every symptom of sunstroke, clasped in her arms, while the baby's father lay on the pavement dead drunk, cut and bleeding, and stunned by a blow dealt by the man who had passed us. Fancy, if you can, what relief a sick child could get in that place, closed on three sides by tall buildings, and opening from those stables.

The last of the Roofers we saw were the men who sleep along the docks and on the flat roofs of the piers, not at all bad lodgings in New York's summer weather. There used to be a pier on the North River side of the city where the "dock-wallopers" and "stevedores" would bring their "best girls," and while some one played the accordion they would have the gayest balls imaginable. In consideration of the immense numbers crowded into the lower, poorer part of the city, and of the intense summer heat, the authorities have been talking of ordering all the new covered piers to be built with flat tops, so they may be used as promenades and lounging-places for the poorer classes. If this be done there will never be a summer's night on which thousands—glad to escape

from their little close lodgings and get a taste of the sweet salt air blowing over the harbour—will not thank the man who first thought of the kindly plan.

## THE RED ROOM.

### A STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS. CHAPTER II.

SIR RICHARD, who was always an early riser, was up earlier than usual next morning. As he purposely went out of his way to pass the door of the Red Room he felt a strong inclination to knock and, as he put it to himself, make sure that it was all right. However, reflecting that perhaps his friend might be annoyed, or, at any rate, would be sure to ridicule him, he thought better of it, persuading himself that it was not likely that anything could happen to a man like Vernon, who had seen any amount of hard fighting in all quarters of the globe, and knew how to take care of himself if any one did. In spite of this conviction he found himself unable to settle to anything, or to carry out any of his ordinary ante-breakfast programme. So he fidgeted about, in and out, driving the servants to distraction by the irregular and unforeseen nature of his movements, until a few of the more advanced stragglers began to put in an appearance and greet him with encomiums on the weather and cheerful anticipations of good sport, to all of which he replied a good deal at random. This being observed by Lady Marsden, she proceeded to add to his perturbation by telegraphing enquiries with her eyebrows over the urn. As a last resource it occurred to him to put an enquiry to one of the servants.

"Do you know, James, whether Major Vernon is— Ah, here he is. Good heavens!"

The exclamation caused everybody to look up and cast curious and enquiring glances from the man who had uttered it to the other who had provoked the same.

"Why, Major," remarked that very young Cattermole who had previously inspired such exceedingly inhospitable sentiments in the generally genial host, "why, Major, how uncommonly seedy you look this morning!"

"Confound his impertinence!" muttered Sir Richard.

"And how on earth did you come by that scratch? Looks as though you'd been out fighting cats on the tiles."

This had the effect of immediately diverting all attention from Sir Richard, and concentrating it on the Major, who was understood to mutter something vague about his hand having slipped in shaving. An explanation which, instead of clearing up matters, only made them worse, for, as young Cattermole subsequently remarked to a friend, "a fellow doesn't generally cut himself from the corner of his eye to his chin in shaving. Besides, a cut is a cut, and a scratch is a scratch, and there is no mistaking the sign of finger-nails."

A sudden sense of restraint seemed to settle down upon those who sat round that well-spread board—a feeling of something "being up," something wrong, instinctively taking possession of the minds even of those who were least acquainted with any cause for the sensation. Sir Richard kept casting furtive glances at his friend, who, independently of the mysterious mark upon his face, certainly merited the expression, "seedy," which had been applied to him. It being also noticeable that, not only did he eat little or nothing, but, when he received his cup of coffee, his hand shook so that half its contents were spilled; and, above all, there was a peculiar lividness underlying the tan of his complexion, productive of a singularly unwholesome effect.

The result of all this upon Lady Marsden was such that she did the wildest things with the sugar tongs, while her general conversation was suggestive of that highly-improving game known as "cross questions and crooked answers."

At the very first opportunity Sir Richard took his friend aside.

"Now, then," he said, "I want to know the truth."

For a moment it appeared as though the other were going to prevaricate.

"The truth!" he repeated. "The truth as to what?"

Then, noting the genuine distress upon Sir Richard's countenance, he altered his tone.

"Dick, old fellow," he said, "I don't know what to say, and I don't know what to think."

"Then there is something in it, after all?" enquired Sir Richard excitedly.

"Dick," answered the other, chewing one end of his long moustache reflectively, "if any one had told you I was an out-and-out coward, what should you have said?"

"Said!" exclaimed his friend; "I

should have told them they didn't know anything about it."

The other smiled a strange, inscrutable smile as he answered:

"It's the truth, Dick."

Then, sinking his voice into a chilling whisper:

"Last night I was afraid—for the first time in my life, and I hope the last."

Sir Richard opened his mouth twice without being able to find utterance. The third time he was more successful, and contrived to put the question:

"What of?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"I give you my word of honour, Dick, I don't know."

"Did you see anything?" The question was put hesitatingly.

"No."

"Then you heard——"

"Nothing."

At this extraordinary state of affairs Sir Richard's condition took such an alarming turn for the worse that his friend, in pity, made an effort at explanation.

"Look here, all I know is this. I fell asleep almost directly, and must have slept some time undisturbed. All at once I became aware of some great horror overshadowing me as I lay in a condition between sleeping and waking. I felt some terrible danger threatened me, but what it was I could not discern. I seemed to be asleep, and yet was perfectly aware of my surroundings, and made several frantic efforts to wake. Then came a sensation of utter darkness—of darkness that could be felt—an expression which I fancy I have heard sometime or other in church; at any rate it exactly explains my condition at the time."

The Major paused for a moment to wipe away the perspiration which had started out upon his forehead. Sir Richard kept his eyes fixed on his friend and never moved them for an instant during the recital.

The other resumed.

"Now comes the worst. In the midst of that horror of darkness a struggle appeared to take place—a struggle in which I was contending against something, what or whom I cannot say, nor even whether the encounter in which I was engaged was mental or physical. I knew a man once—it was when I was in India—who was strangled by a cobra while he was asleep.

I fancy his sensations must have been something like mine."

He shuddered and was silent for a second.

"How long the struggle lasted I cannot say. To me it seemed hours, but it might have been only minutes or even seconds. Again and again I felt that I was on the point of being overcome, and again and again I resisted the unknown but terrible fate that seemed to threaten me. At last, when I felt that it was impossible to hold out longer, I found myself involuntarily repeating, over and over again, a verse that, as a child, I was taught to say before I went to sleep, and which I had no idea I had retained in my memory all these years :

"Four corners to my bed,  
Four angels overhead,  
Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,  
Bless the bed that I lie on."

He broke off here and seemed to challenge the other to laugh at him. Sir Richard, however, did nothing of the sort, but only stared at him with the same fixed stare as before.

"I tell you I found myself repeating these childish words over and over again until it seemed that the blackness became less black and the struggle less fearful, and—well, I can't exactly say I woke, for, as I have told you and now tell you again, I was more or less conscious the whole time, but I found myself sitting upright with the perspiration dripping from me and the light just beginning to steal in through the windows."

As he concluded he was again compelled to wipe the moisture from his forehead.

"But," and it seemed to cause Sir Richard a considerable effort to put the question, "how did you come by that?"

And he drew his own finger across his cheek in the same direction as that taken by the scratch which disfigured his friend's countenance.

"I don't know," was the answer. "All I do know is that it was not there last night though it was the first thing I saw this morning when I looked in the glass."

"Well," said Sir Richard, after a pause, during which he kept his eyes fixed on the scratch, "of course you don't sleep there again, even if we have to make you up a bed on the billiard-table."

"What!" was the indignant response, "do you think I am going to give in like that?"

"But, surely, after your experience of last night——" began the other blankly.

"Do you wish to insult me?" burst in the Major. "Good heavens, man, surely you know me better than that! Offer me any other room and I leave the house."

Then calming down a little :

"Look here, Dick, if you don't want me to regret the confidence I've shown in you, let me have my own way for—well, for another couple of nights at any rate. Come, now, I ask it as a favour?"

"But—but what am I to say to my wife? She suspects something already, and will be sure to insist on knowing all about it."

"Tell her—oh, tell her I had the nightmare," answered the Major. "After all it will be the truth, or something very much like it. By-the-bye, whose portrait is that over the mantelpiece in the Red Room?"

"Portrait?" echoed Sir Richard; "there's no portrait that I know of. Only an old landscape that has hung there ever since I can remember."

The day was fine and the birds plentiful, and as Major Vernon found that, in spite of all, his hand and eye were equally to be depended on, his spirits rose in proportion as his recollections of the previous night became less vivid, until he found himself almost blushing at the remembrance of his terrible feelings.

He was still inclined to the same view of the subject when night came; in spite of which he did not forget to subject the picture over the mantelpiece to another investigation.

"Somehow I forgot to notice it by daylight," he said to himself, "but I will take the present opportunity to convince myself which it actually is—whether landscape or portrait."

Again he threw the light of the candle upon the dark canvas.

"Landscape, by Jupiter!" he exclaimed. "Can it have been my eyes that played me such a trick before? Strange, too, for I can recall the woman's face so plainly, with its evil expression. And then that hand, with the long curved nails—just the sort of nails to——"

A thought struck him. He crossed to the dressing-table where the old-fashioned mirror, broader than it was long, reflected a countenance which now bore an expression quite the opposite to its ordinarily somewhat blasé one.

The long red scratch stood out with startling and angry distinctness.

"Strange," he murmured, "very strange!"

"Why, Major," remarked young Cattermole again at breakfast next morning, "you look even seedier to-day than you did yesterday. Somehow or other your night's rest doesn't seem to agree with you."

As before, public attention was immediately centred upon the individual thus pointedly referred to. Sir Richard glared at the one and looked anxiously at the other; while Lady Marsden, observing thunder in the atmosphere and making an effort to turn the conversation, helped herself to marmalade instead of mustard—a mistake which she accounted for by observing that they both began with the same letter, which made it very confusing.

Apart from the Major's appearance, which was best described by the term ghastly, there was something unfamiliar about him that at once struck Sir Richard without his being able, for the moment, to determine in what it consisted. Meanwhile the object of so much undesired solicitude, feeling compelled to account in some way for the too evident deterioration in his outer man, muttered something about "a touch of his old complaint"—which as it might have been jaundice, lumbago, dyspepsia, toothache, or a hundred other ills, opened up a wide field for conjecture, such as had the welcome effect of staving off young Cattermole's unwelcome attention for the remainder of the meal.

All at once Sir Richard succeeded in solving to his satisfaction the cause of the alteration in his friend's appearance.

"It's the collar," he told himself; "I never remember to have seen Vernon in one of those stiff, upright, all-round affairs before. I wonder what has made him take to that style all at once? And I wonder whether he had another attack of nightmare, or anything of the sort, last night?"

Both questions were answered later on.

"What sort of a night did I have, you ask?" said the Major. "Just look here."

He removed collar and tie, thus laying bare his throat, upon the surface of which several bluish marks and discolourations were visible.

"What—what on earth!" Sir Richard stuttered and stammered.

"What does it mean, you ask? That is just the question that I have been putting to myself. You remember what I told you yesterday of my experience of the night before? Well, it was just the same thing over again, only, if possible, more vivid and acute. There was the same horror of darkness—though, as before, I was half conscious of my surroundings—followed by that impotent struggling against something vague, intangible, and terrible. But this time it was accompanied by a sense of suffocation. Something, I thought, was slowly pressing the life out of me—my breath was almost exhausted, when, by a fearful effort, which it distresses me even to recall, I forced myself upright, feeling, somehow, that this time I had only escaped by the skin of my teeth—though from what I don't know."

"Vernon," said Sir Richard, "after this you cannot, you must not dream of occupying the room another night."

A dogged expression settled upon the other man's countenance.

"I mean to see this thing through," he answered, "and nothing that you can urge will alter my determination. One more night and then——"

"Did you ever," his host put the question in a solemn, stealthy manner, "did you ever hear the story in connection with the Red Room? I have almost forgotten it myself, but I may as well tell you what I do know."

"No, no," was the hasty response, "not now, I will not hear it now. Wait one more night—wait until to-morrow and tell me then."

### CHAPTER III.

THAT day passed as had the previous one, and night came again.

"I wonder," said the Major, as he contemplated himself grimly in the mirror, in which he saw reflected plainly the long red scratch upon his face, as well as the purple discolourations upon his throat; "I wonder what other personal embellishments I may have to boast of by this time to-morrow? Perhaps a black eye or a broken nose. Well, there is only this one night."

This time he did not fall asleep so quickly. For some time he lay watching the fire as it burnt itself out. A sudden spurt of flame made a momentary illumination by which the picture over the mantelpiece became plainly visible.



"By Jove!" he muttered, raising himself on his elbow, "the portrait again, by all that's mysterious!"

The flame died out as quickly as it had kindled, but the last thing it showed him was the gleam of those malignant eyes, and those long, curved, talon-like fingers.

For a moment he debated as to whether he should rise and turn the picture to the wall, but disinclination to stir, together with a fierce contempt of his own weakness, kept him where he was. Then he dozed, or seemed to doze, though through it all he was aware of that face looking down upon him, and gradually coming nearer and nearer, until he felt those basilisk orbs glaring straight into his own in spite of the closed lids and——

With an effort he regained possession of his senses, at least, of so much of them as allowed him to become conscious of—— what?

The fire, which had appeared to have died out, suddenly revived, sending forth a dull red glow that revealed to him plainly the outlines of the furniture in the room, and the curtains of the bed, bringing out strange, unsuspected tints in these last, of which he found himself idly taking note.

"It is the colour of blood," he murmured—"the colour of blood—the colour——"

Was it the effect of the firelight flickering upon it, or did one of the curtains at the foot of the bed move?

Yes, it was being drawn back slowly and noiselessly. What was that? Surely, an arm—a long, lean, brown arm, with a hand terminating in curved, claw-like fingers and long, pointed nails.

A horror, such as few are ever destined to experience, fell upon him as he realised this. His limbs became powerless, and his tongue felt like a piece of dried leather in his mouth. Then the curtain was dropped and the thing disappeared.

But instead of this proving a relief, the thought of its being there—somewhere—hidden—but still there—was so full of unspeakable terror, that he could almost have prayed to see it again.

Where was it? Where was it?

He rolled his head—the only portion of his body in which was any power of movement—on the pillow in the endeavour to—— Ah!

Casting his eyes upwards he caught sight of it smoothly insinuating its way through the canopy overhead. It was

going to attack him from above while he lay there helpless, like a log, and could not even cry aloud for deliverance from the cursed thing. And all the time he knew not even whether he was sleeping or waking.

With an effort he succeeded in closing his eyes. But only for a second; for the uncertainty as to what was about to happen was more awful than anything else. So he opened them again, and, no—it was there no longer.

He tried to move his head as he had before, but it was fixed—fixed as in a vice. From head to foot he was like a dead man—a dead man!

What was that?

Something was moving softly and delicately—travelling over the pillow towards him. It was an arm, a long, lean, brown arm—a woman's arm—an arm that had no body belonging to it—which was slipping, slowly but surely, over the pillow towards the place where his head lay, and drawing nearer and nearer, nearer and nearer, with the fingers curved and the long, sharp, cruel nails glistening horribly. To think that he could not utter a sound—not the very faintest sound, though his life depended on it! And the arm—the long, brown, bodiless arm—was coming nearer and nearer; in another second those fingers would have clutched his throat, those long nails be embedded in his flesh and——

Sir Richard was uneasy in his mind. He could not sleep; indeed he did not even try to sleep. Irresistibly the idea was suggested to him that his friend—his very oldest and best friend—was threatened by some vague, but no less unmistakable peril.

"He wouldn't let me tell him the story of the Red Room, though, after all, I don't know what good that would have done. Still, I wish I had done so, and I wish even more that it would not keep presenting itself so plainly to my mind, when I had almost forgotten it, too."

A clock struck in the distance and Sir Richard took a sudden determination.

"I'll just slip on some clothes and go upstairs and creep along the passage to the door of his room. Perhaps he doesn't lock his door, or he may have forgotten it for once—at any rate I can listen and then, if everything seems all right, I can come away without disturbing any one, and my mind will be more at ease."

The determination once formed was

speedily put into practice, and Sir Richard found himself, candle in hand, stealing like a thief at dead of night up the stairs and along the passages of his own house.

The Red Room lay some distance away from his own apartment, and at the rate at which he was travelling he had ample time in which to change his mind with regard to his purpose, and bestow various uncomplimentary epithets upon himself. When he reached the door, however, he told himself that he might just as well try it and see whether it was locked or not. He would do so very softly, without disturbing any one, and accordingly had laid his hand upon the lock, when—

His ear was caught by a sound from within—a muffled, gasping, choking sound—a sound that suggested horrible possibilities. Whether the door was locked or not he never knew. In another instant he had burst it open.

"Hal!" he cried, "Hal! What is it? For Heaven's sake answer me!"

But there was no answer. Only the sound continued, though much fainter, as though it would soon cease altogether.

He rushed to the bed, tore aside the curtain, and saw—what?

The face of his friend, convulsed, agonised, almost black with—what was that thing clutching his throat?

It looked like a hand—a small, brown, woman's hand.

Whatever it was, Sir Richard flung himself upon it, but even as he seemed to grasp it, it melted away and there was nothing but the bare throat of the man before him, whose breathing seemed now to have ceased altogether.

Hardly knowing what he did, Sir Richard rushed to the window and flung it open; then, returning, caught up the water jug and half deluged the bed and its occupant with its contents. Fortunately this Spartan treatment appeared to suit the case, for, after a few premonitory symptoms of returning consciousness, Sir Richard had the satisfaction of seeing his friend open his eyes.

Catching sight of the familiar but anxious countenance bending over him, a look of relief crossed his face, followed by another of perplexed enquiry as to his whereabouts and the reason of his unpleasantly damp condition.

This, in turn, was succeeded by one of horror, as, raising his head from his pillow, he looked round him and asked in a queer, strangled, barely audible voice:

"Is it gone?"

"What?" enquired Sir Richard with intense eagerness.

To which the other, speaking thickly, and as though it pained him, answered with a shudder:

"That long, brown arm!"

Next morning there was considerable comment excited by the appearance of the Major with a bandage round his throat.

"Sore throat! Lost his voice," remarked the irrepressible young Cattermole later on to a crony. "What an unfortunate beggar the fellow is. Still, for all that, I don't see any reason why Sir Richard should have lost his temper, and as nearly as possible told me to mind my own business, when I happened to ask the Major whether he had felt anything of it yesterday, or whether it came on suddenly in the night."

"And what is the original story in connection with the Red Room?" asked the Major on the very first opportunity when he and his host were alone, and the former's voice was a little restored to him.

"Well," was the answer, "all I know is that a long time ago—a hundred years or more—one of my ancestors took for a second wife a woman of foreign extraction, who came from no one knew where. His first wife had died leaving him with one son, and in due course this new wife presented him with another. She was, according to report, of a strange, fierce nature, and her husband and every one else went in fear of her. As time went on she began to show signs of intense jealousy and hatred towards her stepson, who, on his father's death, would naturally succeed him. Towards her own offspring she exhibited the same degree of savage affection which a tigress may be supposed to lavish upon her young.

"As these two youths grew up they bore a strong family resemblance, in spite of the difference of parentage on the female side; what was more they were—for step-brothers—unusually attached to each other. This mutual affection, however, so far from softening the mother of the younger, merely seemed to inspire her with fiercer wrath and envy towards her husband's elder son and heir. So one night, having excited herself to a murderous rage against the young man who stood between her son and the title and estate, she stole to the room where her stepson slept—"

"The Red Room," interpolated the Major.

"The Red Room," acquiesced Sir Richard, "and with her own hands——"

"Well, go on," impatiently, as Sir Richard paused in order to accentuate the denouement.

"With her own hands strangled the sleeper."

"Her own stepson," commented the Major. "Ugh! what a ghastly story!"

"Hear it out," said Sir Richard. "It was night when she committed the crime. As soon as it was light she returned, possibly to gloat over her victim, instead of which she made a terrible discovery."

"And that was?"

"For some freak or other the two step-brothers had changed apartments. The younger, on that particular night, had occupied his elder brother's room and bed, so that her awful act had reverted upon her own head, and instead of the hated elder she had killed her own only son."

"Horrible!" exclaimed the Major. "More than horrible! Is anything further known about her?"

"Very little, beyond the fact that she is supposed to have perished by her own hand."

The Major mused for a moment before putting the next question.

"Have you a portrait of her anywhere?"

Sir Richard shook his head.

"I believe there was one; but what became of it I do not know. Possibly it was destroyed by some one who considered that, as the original was no credit to the name, the preservation of the duplicate would be more or less of an insult to the rest of the family portraits."

"Then you know absolutely nothing respecting her appearance?"

"Well, I have heard that she was remarkable for her brown, swarthy skin; so much so, indeed, that she was known by the nickname of 'the gipsy.'"

Major Vernon is sometimes asked how he came by that peculiar long red mark which is more like a scratch than a scar, and which it seems he will carry with him to the grave.

His explanation is not very lucid, and it is generally known among his friends that he dislikes any reference to it. As for those marks on his throat, as he always wears a high collar very few are aware of their existence.

The Red Room has never been occupied since, for the very good reason that Sir Richard has caused the entrance to it to be bricked up.

## MISS LATIMER OF BRYANS.

By ELEANOR C. PRICE.

Author of "*Alexia*," "*Red Towers*," "*The Little One*," etc.

### CHAPTER XXXIV.

#### THE DAY BEFORE THE WEDDING.

It is no use lingering over the history of the spring months at Bryans, as their slow passing brought the double wedding nearer.

Poppy hardly knew why she was not quite happy, for Arthur wrote to her constantly, and Mrs. Nugent sent accounts of his health which were more and more cheerful. She, at least, was a happy and triumphant woman. In the mind of her future daughter-in-law there were no fears for the future. To her Arthur seemed still the charming, handsome, sweet-natured young soldier who had won her heart so suddenly at Saint-Carolus, or perhaps more truly at Herzheim—for Poppy secretly thought that she and Arthur were a proof of the existence of love at first sight, the most beautiful possibility of human nature. Thus, when she seriously asked herself why everything in life did not now show such rosy colours as belonged to last September, she never thought of blaming Arthur for the change in herself. The uncertainty of his health was quite enough to account for any moody fancies he might have shown in the winter. He was stronger now, the cold weather was nearly gone: all brightness would come back with May.

Poppy only wished—and this she thought was her chief trouble—that her friend Maggie could be as happy as herself. She was seriously concerned about Maggie. The girl was almost losing her beauty, so thin and pale had she grown. Her old liveliness, her pretty, affectionate ways, seemed all gone. She avoided Poppy instead of flying to her on every occasion, and spent most of her time in her grandfather's sick-room. Her engagement to Geoffrey dragged its length along, and to judge by their faces, made neither of them at all happier. Poppy saw too plainly what a mistake that engagement had been. Sometimes, often indeed, the remembrance of Geoffrey Thorne's silent confession sent through all her well-balanced nature a shiver that burned like flame. How dared he?

One day, after a painful effort at the old affectionate freedom with Maggie, she kissed the girl and asked her if she was happy.

"Don't marry him if—if you are not quite sure," she whispered.

It seemed impossible to give a stronger hint than this of the risk that Maggie was running. But the girl turned her head away, shook her shoulder free from the hand that lay upon it, and answered with a quick hardness of tone:

"I am quite sure. There's not a better man living than Geoffrey."

After that Poppy could say no more; but she allowed a barrier to rise between herself and her neighbours. Poor, desolate liege lady, it was only too plain that her vassals did not want her any more, that some sort of shadow fell upon them with her presence. She said nothing, but wished for the summer, when things would have become irrevocable, and new lives, both for herself and Maggie, would have begun. For her aunt and the Rector she had nothing but an even sweetness, which helped to salve Miss Latimer's troublesome conscience, and to keep the Rector in a state of blindness as to the origin of the clouds which sometimes swept over his little lady.

In the middle of April, Mrs. Nugent and Arthur arrived in London from Cannes, and Poppy and her aunt went up to meet them. The southern sun had done a good deal for Arthur; his skin looked darker, his eyes brighter than before. He was very handsome; the languor of his manner was now only graceful and pleasant, having lost its winter peevishness, and towards Poppy he showed a gentle devotion that gave great satisfaction to his mother and Miss Latimer. Evidently he was come back in the best frame of mind, determined to be a good boy. Poppy wished him to come down to Bryans before the wedding, but he made some excuse for which Miss Latimer blessed him in her heart. He would not come before a certain Wednesday in the second week of May. On the next day, Thursday, at two o'clock in the afternoon, he and Poppy, and Geoffrey Thorne and Maggie, were to be married in the old church at Bryans.

The weeks rolled quickly on and brought that Wednesday. As it approached, Geoffrey Thorne grew every day graver and more thoughtful, yet kinder, even more tender, in his manner towards

the girl to whom he had offered his life. She was herself seldom to be seen outside Church Corner. The old man was failing fast, and though he might live for months or years, another stroke might bring the end at any time. Maggie would herself have put off the wedding, but her grandfather's one wish was to know that it was over, and that she was safely Geoffrey's wife. He had taken a kind of fancy to Lucy Thorne, and she had promised to watch him while Geoffrey and Maggie went away for a fortnight. Then they were coming back to Church Corner, to stay with him as long as he lived. It did not cost Geoffrey much to agree to this. To the wedding itself he looked forward with horror, wondering how he could ever have consented to such an arrangement. But after all, it was only one thing more to be lived through.

Poppy had come down from London happier than she had been all the spring. Everything looked bright to her now. Arthur's influence had been peaceful, not disturbing; he seemed so light-hearted about the future that she was obliged to believe, in spite of herself, that everything would turn out well. On the evening of her return she sent Maggie a diamond ring, with a few affectionate words hastily written. They did not alter the fact that in old days she would have taken it to the girl herself, and put it on her finger with a kiss; and perhaps Maggie felt this, for it was a lame and stiff little note that she sent her friend in answer. But tears ran down on the ring as she looked at it.

The week that was fixed for the wedding began and continued with that soft, exquisite brilliancy which still sometimes belongs to May, justifying her old claim to be queen of all the months in the year. The beech-woods shone in the warm sunlight that seemed absolutely to sparkle among the light polished green of their young leaves; the oaks and the tall poplars, as the sun caught them, were yellow like gold. All the leaves were bursting from their winter sheaths, the fresh grass was growing. Primroses and bluebells and cowslips were not over; but lilacs were coming into scented bloom, hawthorn buds were swelling, young ferns uncurling themselves. The white clouds that lay in lazy lines on a sky of clear, deep, dazzling blue did not even suggest a shower. At night the moon shone on a still, sweet world in which storms seemed unknown.



On that Wednesday Bryans was in full swing of preparation. The double wedding made a double excitement, for "young Geoffrey Thorne" was a little of a hero, even beyond his own hamlet, and had always been popular. Bryans thought it quite right, though the county smiled at a foolish scrap of romance, that Miss Latimer should choose to be married at the same time as her pretty village friend and the man who had saved her life in Paris. So the parish was a good deal roused, on the whole, from its usual sleepiness, and when the Rector and Miss Fanny walked down from the Court, early in the afternoon, to see how things were getting on, and whether the church was ready for the next day, they found several arches in course of being put up in the village street. They walked slowly through the wood, past Church Corner, and along the road to the churchyard gate, meeting many friendly smiles by the way.

None of the wedding guests had arrived yet. Only Arthur Nugent had come down that morning; and Mr. Cantillon, with whom he was to stay that night, had taken him to the Court to luncheon, now leaving him there with Poppy in the garden. The Rector was pleased with Arthur's improved appearance, and Miss Latimer smiled and agreed with him, though in a rather pre-occupied way.

"I must forget my prejudices now," said Mr. Cantillon. "After all, Arthur may make a tolerable squire. He is a good-looking fellow, and perhaps not really conceited, though I hate that manner of his. That sort of indifference, too, makes me angry. Why, I had to wait twenty minutes at least before he was ready to walk up with me this morning. Though I see you every day, Fanny, I was the most impatient of the two."

"We must not expect a young man of the period to be like you, dear," said Fanny smiling. "You are romantic, you know."

"Romantic! I am in love," said the Rector. "And that is what he ought to be. I hope he is, I'm sure; but nothing can ever make him good enough for her. However, as I say, we must make the best of him. What a sky! Happy is the bride that the sun shines on. I hope they will both be happy—both the brides. I have more doubt about that other marriage, you know. This may turn out well enough, though it is not ideal; but poor Geoffrey Thorne is very much on my mind—very much indeed. He is so much too good

for that girl; and she, poor thing! does not look happy either. Geoffrey avoids me—well, perhaps it is natural. I never thought he would marry anybody, and he knows it."

"Very much better that he should. I think it is an excellent marriage," said Miss Latimer firmly. "I have never changed my opinion about that."

"I wish they both looked happier. But, Fanny, to tell you the truth, I don't think any one is quite happy, except you and I."

"That is a strong argument against early marriages. Perhaps we had better wait ten years longer. Think it over, Henry. We might grow happier every year."

"Thank you, I'm quite satisfied. I want nothing more, not even delay. Do you know, my dear, I shall be glad when this wedding is over, for your sake, and not quite selfishly. Porphyria's affairs have worried you too much. I have thought so for several months. I never liked to tease you, but I have often wished to know the reason of a certain little air of worry. Even to-day, when I came in with Arthur, I thought some contretemps—well, there was something mysterious which depressed me slightly. What was it, Fanny?"

Miss Fanny Latimer did not answer instantly. This was partly because a moment's glance at the Rector seemed to show her depths of sweetness and trustworthiness which actually brought happy tears into those bright blue eyes of hers, and with them an odd feeling in her throat which made words impossible. It was a mixed consciousness that Henry, being too good for this world, would certainly have spoilt everything if she had told him her trouble in the winter, and also that she might at any time in the future confide all, without fearing a word of reproach. Even now, she thought, she might safely say anything. The day before the wedding was almost as safe as the day after, and she would really be much happier when Henry knew all.

At this moment, however, she could not speak, for they had reached the churchyard gate, where several village girls were busy twisting evergreens round the arch that had already been set up there. The churchyard grass was being mown, the path swept; the church itself was being cleaned with tremendous energy, and the Rector made his way up the long paved aisle through an array of pails and brooms and past streams of water. The afternoon

sun shone softly into the stately old choir, with its tombs of Fitz-Bryans and Latimers.

Fanny sat down in a safe place by the door, and with a preoccupied mind watched the Rector's small dark figure moving about the choir. She knew that he was planning and rehearsing once more the ceremony of to-morrow, feeling anxiously responsible that all should go well; his boyish, simple mind fully sharing in the feeling of the village, that such a wedding as this had seldom, if ever, taken place in Bryans Church before.

Fanny, as she watched him, felt herself overcome by a great weariness. To her, she thought, when this wedding was once over there would come perfect rest and the end of all worries. Though she had done so much in helping Mrs. Nugent to carry out her plans, she had never been quite free of the pricks of conscience, of a lurking instinct that loyalty to her friend had not quite meant loyalty to her niece too. During the first few weeks of the engagement, while there seemed no doubt of Poppy's happiness with Arthur, she had been easy and comforted, but since Mrs. Arch's revelations, since the ball, since that morning's talk in the library, she had often felt like nothing better than a traitor, though telling herself all the time that she was acting for the best. It had been hard to speak to Arch, almost to tell her that she was mistaken, to hint broadly that another word on the subject would cause the deepest displeasure. Miss Frances, though not a very true Latimer, had a good deal of dignity of her own, but even that almost failed under the surprise, indignation, scorn, which was written on the face of the housekeeper.

"Very well, ma'am. I know my place," Mrs. Arch had said. "Not another word shall be spoken."

Arthur's return in so good a frame of mind, and the smoothness with which things were going now, had comforted Fanny a good deal. She was used to Arch's solemn face, which grew more gloomy every day that brought the wedding nearer. Poppy had noticed it too, of course, and laughed at it, saying that Arch could not bear an intruder in the family. Arthur had disliked Mrs. Arch very cordially from the beginning, and had made up his mind long ago that she must be got rid of. It would be impossible, he said to his mother, to have one's condemnation walking about the house for

ever. Mrs. Nugent smiled and told him to have a little patience. When he was once master of Bryans, all would be easy, all would be well.

Fanny Latimer on the old bench by the church door, absorbed in pitying herself for the past and dreaming of the rest of the future, hardly knew that the Rector had come back to her till she felt his gentle touch upon her shoulder. She rose silently and went out with him.

"Come this way," he said; and they crossed the road, turned into the field path that led to his house, and walked slowly down to the bridge, under the soft and silvery willows, up the path again into his garden, now gay with tulips and forget-me-nots, and sweet with lilies of the valley. The windows in his gabled house, shining from a green setting of leaves, seemed to smile their welcome to the graceful little lady who came with the Rector up his garden walk. These two sat down on a bench under a young oak, whose leaves rustled gently, yellow in the sunshine. On the other side of the valley the church clock struck four.

"I did not know it was so late," said Fanny restlessly. "How delightful it is here; how pretty your flowers are, Henry! But I must go home, you know."

"Why, my dear, you have nothing to do at home. I want to talk to you. Now that we have thoroughly arranged to-morrow"—he had gone into some final details as they crossed the field—"I want to know when my day is to be. Must we really wait till those young people have settled down?"

"Yes, I told you," said Fanny, a little wearily. "If you knew how tired I am! After to-morrow I shall go to sleep for a month. Then perhaps I may wake up and begin to think about you."

She said this, her eyes resting on the forget-me-nots. As he did not answer, she looked round at him, and saw the disappointment in his face. Had he not waited long enough? Was he to be played with for ever? Fanny smiled very sweetly and laid her hand on his. He bent over and kissed her; not even a bird was indiscreet enough to peep at these old lovers through the leaves.

Something in the earnestness of his gentle sentiment was irresistible.

"Dear," she said, "I give you my word, it shall not be longer than six weeks. I really have a great deal to think about, you know. But after to-morrow every-

thing will be easy, and perhaps I shall begin to realise that the rest of life is to be peace—with you—which I really cannot understand yet. You have been so clever, you have seen lately that I was worried—little you know what dreadful worry it has been. Sometimes in these last few months I have felt nearly wild, though just lately, since Arthur came home and seemed all right, I have been happier. But to bear all that without saying a word to Poppy, or even to you, and with poor old Arch looking daggers at me, and knowing that the village talked, and that all might go wrong in spite of everything—dear Henry, it has been a trying time, I assure you."

As she talked, the Rector's smile died away, and his face was shadowed by a puzzled frown.

"But I did not know," he said. "What do you mean about the village? What has it been talking about?"

"No, you didn't know. It was only foolishness, you see, and those things are so terribly exaggerated. Of course there was a good deal there ought not to have been, and I only wonder nothing came to your ears. At first I hardly knew whether to be sorry or glad that you knew nothing, because you are rather impulsive, and you might have insisted on saying something to Poppy, and then I don't know what would have happened. Not this wedding to-morrow, I'm afraid—and really now I see it would have been a pity, because Arthur was a good deal ashamed of himself, and Poppy is very fond of him, poor dear, and I dare say it will be all right in the end, as the girl is going to marry a steady sort of man. Of course the idea of the double wedding seemed to me impossible at first, but you see it was Poppy's wish, so I could not oppose it without some better reason than I really dared give. It is all over now, you know, Henry. Arch stopped the talk as far as she could; and, after all, though it was very wrong and foolish, there was not much to talk about."

"It is not easy to understand you," said the Rector with great gentleness. "You cannot possibly mean what you seem to say."

"What do I seem to say? It really is rather difficult to explain."

"Why, my dear, I make out from what you say that some village gossip has connected Arthur Nugent's name with some girl—can you possibly mean Miss Farrant?—that you knew it, that Arch

knew it, that you silenced the gossip and said nothing, and that it was not mere gossip, but true!"

"Exaggerated—very much exaggerated—it was indeed, Henry."

He was silent for a moment or two. She lifted her eyes anxiously, half sorry now that she had not kept her troubles to herself a little longer. But he had been so kind, so sweet, and the little walk and the garden in this May sunshine so peaceful; it had seemed impossible to resist the longing that came over her to lay her burden down.

"Are you angry with me—was I so very wrong?" she murmured half playfully.

"Angry! no; but you cannot have done it," he said with a quick touch of impatience. "But tell me more. When did this gossip reach you?"

"Oh, months ago, the very evening of the ball. Listen, and I will tell you everything, all I know, and then I think you will see that I could not have acted differently. Of course my first impulse was to tell Poppy, and you, and everybody else—but then I had so much to consider—and poor Laura Nugent!"

"Is not she capable of fighting her own battles?" said the Rector with a faint smile. "Go on, please. I might have known that your first impulse would be the right one."

"Was it? Oh, no, I don't think it was. Well," with a sigh, "to go back to that dreadful evening, Henry——"

And so at last, sitting under Mr. Cantillon's tree, while he listened in grave silence, Fanny Latimer told him everything.

His manner frightened her; but having once begun, she felt it impossible to stop, and at the bottom of her heart all the time there was relief mingled with fear. He said little, even when she had finished, and asked her very few questions, sitting thoughtfully with his head upon his hand. Once Fanny, looking at him, saw that his eyes were closed and his lips were moving, while he had turned very pale. Her own heart was beating painfully, and at that moment a terrible thought came to her—had she lost him, by what might seem to him her unpardonable silence? Was it a fault past forgiveness to have known all this, and yet to have allowed Poppy's engagement to go on? Poor little Fanny Latimer had not much bravado in her composition, if she had not much strength.

"Henry," she said, in a low, unhappy voice, "are you angry with me?"

For a minute or two he did not answer at all. Then he got up suddenly and gave himself a shake, as if to rouse himself from some bad dream. He walked away from her a few steps between the rows of tulips, and then came back and stood before her.

"My dear," he said, "you have allowed yourself to be made the tool of a worldly and unprincipled woman, and thus you have very nearly been the means of ruining four lives."

"Oh!"

"Of course you had a good motive; but do you now see the whole thing, Fanny, as clearly as I do? You were going to stand by and see Porphyria—our charge, yours and mine—married to a man—well, not fit to be spoken of among honourable men."

"Henry, you are too hard."

"I am not too hard. As for the other marriage—you were going to let a good man like Geoffrey Thorne, from a motive which I see clearly now, marry a girl so unworthy, so disloyal, as to carry on a flirtation with the man who is engaged to her friend. Was there ever a more horrible complication? And to please Mrs. Nugent, to avoid scandal, you have lent yourself to this. Do you realise what marriage is? Is not sin worse than scandal?"

Fanny bent her head. In spite of herself, tears were running down, and she could not bear that he should see them. But he did see them, and instantly coming back to his place beside her, he took both her hands in his and kissed her once again.

"My dear Fanny, you will always trust me in future," he said. "And let us thank Heaven that even this time you have not put it off till too late."

"But it is too late!" Fanny gasped in a sob.

"Do you really suppose that I shall read the Marriage Service for those four people to-morrow? How strange that I had presentiments! I have never been happy about either engagement."

"But Henry, dear," cried Miss Latimer in terror, "do listen to reason. It can't

be broken off now. It is too late, really. Do think of everything."

"That is difficult, with so few hours before me," said the Rector, faintly smiling. "But when it is a question of saving four lives, I don't know that one need so very cautiously look before and after. Come, let us go back to the Court. Five o'clock! Poppy will think I have run away with you."

Fanny, half bewildered, full of helpless, useless arguments, allowed herself to be led home. What Henry meant to do, and how he meant to do it, was almost beyond the reach of her rather limited imagination.

In all her happy years afterwards she will never forget that evening in May, with its shining beauty of perfect spring, the lengthening shadows in transparent air which gave a kind of youthful grace to the stiff lines of the Court, standing there upon its lawns, among its bright and varied trees. All the world of Bryans had seemed, an hour before, to be alive with preparation for a festival, and the future had shone out as clearly as the blue long vistas of Porphyria's park. Now, as Miss Latimer walked up bewildered to the terrace, her eyes and mind were oppressed by clouds of fog and mist, rolling in like a great unquiet sea. The strangely firm look in Henry Cantillon's face, as he hurried her along, did not make things much better.

"What can you do? What can you do?" she repeated continually.

Then they met Poppy face to face, coming across from the lawn. She was alone; and they saw at once that an extraordinary change had come over her too; for her lips were tightly set, and her grey eyes looked hard like stone. Mr. Cantillon at least was glad.

"Porphyria—my dear, may I speak—" he began, while Fanny Latimer stared breathlessly.

Poppy paused for an instant. She did not look at either of them, but it seemed as if she was trying to answer and could not. At last she said in a low, hoarse tone: "I know," and walked slowly away into the house, leaving them standing there.

#### ADVERTISEMENT DEPARTMENT.

For particulars respecting Advertisement Spaces, address THE ADVERTISING MANAGER of "All the Year Round," No. 163, Fleet Street, London, E.C.

*The Right of Translating Articles from ALL THE YEAR ROUND is reserved by the Authors.*